

Debussy, *Jeux*: Playing with Time and Form

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Debussy's *Jeux*, ignored for many years because of its banal scenario,¹ recently has prompted great interest among composers and musicologists.² Although they have succeeded in demonstrating a certain unity based on motives (Eimert), instrumentation (Zenck), intervals (Spies), and pitch sets (Jakobik), they have failed to find the key to its form. Their analyses have skirted half of the central problem: *Jeux* concerns not just sound but also time.

In the program of the concert version of *Jeux* on 1 March 1914, Debussy described the scenario of the ballet in terms of time and metric alternation:

After a very slow prelude of several measures . . . a first motive *scherzando* in 3/8 appears, soon interrupted by the return of the prelude. . . . Then the *scherzando* resumes with a second motive. At this point the action begins: a ball falls on stage. [After the young man has danced with the first girl,] scorn and jealousy cause the other girl to begin an ironic and mocking dance (2/4) and thus attracts the attention of the young man: he invites her to a (3/8) waltz. . . . The first girl, abandoned, wants to leave, but the second holds her back (3/4, very moderate). Now all three dance (3/8) quicker and quicker up to the moment of ecstasy (3/4, very moderate), which is interrupted by another stray tennis ball, causing the three young people to flee: return of the chords of the prelude; a few more notes slide furtively, and that's all.³

¹The idea for Debussy's *Jeux* came in a conversation over lunch between Diaghilev, Nijinsky, and the French painter and "godfather" of the Russian troupe, Jacques-Emile Blanche. In his memoirs *La Pêche aux souvenirs* (Paris, 1949), pp. 423, 430–31, Blanche records how Diaghilev charged him with writing the ballet's scenario and with telegraphing Debussy, proposing that he write the music for this ballet. Debussy, after first telegraphing back "Subject ballet *Jeux* idiotic, not interested," later found the financial arrangement too tempting and agreed to the commission.

²This paper was given in 1978 in two shortened forms at the École Pratique des Hautes Études of the Sorbonne and at Oberlin College. Other relatively recent studies of *Jeux*, which include in their analyses reviews of older studies, are Pierre Boulez, a study in *Gravesaner Blätter* nos. 2 and 3 (1956), 5, and "Debussy," in his *Relèves d'Apprenti* (Paris, 1966), pp. 327–47; Herbert Eimert, "Debussy's

Jeux," *Die Reihe* 5 (1959), 3–20; Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Von Webern zu Debussy, Bemerkungen zur statistischen Form," *Texte zur elektronischen und instrumentalen Musik* (Cologne, 1963), pp. 75–85; J. P. Guézec, "A propos de *Jeux*," *Le Courrier musical de France* 21 (1968), pp. 226–28; Erwin Hardeck, "Debussys '*Jeux*': Struktur-Stellung im Gesamtwerk," *Bericht über den Internationalen Musikwissenschaftlichen Kongress* (Bonn, 1970), pp. 424–26; Claudia Maria Zenck, "Form- und Farbenspiele: Debussy's '*Jeux*,'" *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 33 (1976), 28–47; Albert Jakobik, *Claude Debussy oder die lautlose Revolution in der Musik* (Wurzburg, 1977), pp. 127–52; Markus Spies, "Jeux," *Musik-Konzepte*, nos. 1 & 2 (Claude Debussy), (December, 1977), pp. 77–95; Lawrence Berman, "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun and *Jeux*: Debussy's Summer Rites," this journal 3 (1980), pp. 225–38; Robin Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London, 1979).

³Jean Barraqué, *Debussy* (Paris, 1962), pp. 166, 169. Barraqué says that although Debussy did not sign this text, there is every reason to believe that he did write the essay. All translations are by the present author unless otherwise stated.

Debussy's deliberateness in naming tempo and meter in conjunction with the scenario points to the importance of time and suggests a possible connection between the scenario and the temporal organization of the piece.

In *Jeux*, the scenario of a tennis game provided Debussy with an ideal context for experimenting with time and form as functions of invention rather than as formulae. In this ballet, *jeux* (games) without predictable results are played on many levels. The movement of a tennis ball seems to have motivated the playful and ever-inventive movement from one instrument to the next. But in a letter of April 1912 to Stravinsky, Debussy implies how in an even more striking way the scenario inspired musical *jeux*.

I would love to have your opinion about this *playing around* among the three characters. You seem to be astonished by the title of "*Jeux*" and would prefer to call it "The Park." I beg you to believe that "*Jeux*" is better. First of all, it is terse, and then it conveys in an appropriate way the "scandal" that takes place among the three characters (emphasis added).⁴

The tenuous relationship among the three dancers—a symbolic representation of Diaghilev and his two lovers, according to Nijinsky⁵—motivated a continuous renewal of musical ideas. Depending on the character he wished the listener to watch or on a character's feelings, Debussy created a different tone color and "psychological"⁶ time for each moment.

⁴Pierre Souvchinsky, ed., *Avec Stravinsky* (Monte Carlo, 1958), p. 200. "J'aimerais en avoir votre opinion sur ce badinage . . . à trois. A propos de *Jeux*, vous êtes étonné de ce titre auquel vous préféreriez 'Le Parc.' Je vous supplie de croire que 'Jeux' est meilleur, d'abord c'est plus net, puis cela dit d'une façon convenable les 'horreurs' qui se passent entre ces trois personnages."

⁵Richard Buckle, *Nijinsky* (New York, 1971), pp. 250–91, contains an interesting account of *Jeux* in which he compares this account to the origin of the ballet, derived from Nijinsky's diary, with others.

⁶Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music* (Cambridge, 1942), pp. 30–31. "Everyone knows that time passes at a rate which varies according to the inner dispositions of the subject and to the events that come to affect his consciousness. Expectation, boredom, anguish, pleasure, contemplation, and pain—all of these thus come to appear as different categories in the midst of which our life unfolds, and each of these determines a special psychological time. . . . The music that adheres to psychological time likes to proceed by contrast."

The musical interplay between contrasting timbres and various rhythmic and metric patterns mirrors the interaction among the characters, who run into each other on the court, flirt, dance, and are scared away by the intrusion of a tennis ball.

The successive volleys of a tennis game, as well as the ever-changing relationships between the three characters, thus inspired a musical form in constant flux. To solve the problem of organizing that flux, Debussy had to concentrate on the shaping of time as his main structural procedure. What gives *Jeux* its formal coherence is its overall rhythmic organization; recurrence of motives and timbres support this form rather than create it.

I

An examination of one of the individual sections of the ballet will show how Debussy creates a unique quality of sound and time for each event in the ballet.⁷ He does this primarily by employing a different motive for each section. With its quantitative aspects fixed—that is, its metric, melodic, and even harmonic shape—the motive recurs in frequent succession throughout the section it characterizes. Such repetition does not serve to construct a melody or fill a formal scheme; instead, it directs the listener's attention to the different instrumental and temporal contexts in which the motive appears. Because the motives in *Jeux* are short, usually two measures in length or built of two one-measure elements, Debussy uses them to shift interest from the level of melody to the movement of larger segments of the music. In this way, the rhythm of motives grows to be the rhythm of form.

The motive *ab* saturates and helps to define the first major section of the piece after the opening prelude, the section between rehearsal numbers 1 and 5 (see table 1, p. 62). While the upbeat rhythmic character of *a* (m. 9) and the two chromatically descending semitones of *b* (C♯–B♯–B♮ in m. 10) are maintained throughout the entire section, other aspects of *ab* change. First Debussy translates the motive from

⁷All references are to the original edition of the score published by Durand (Paris, 1914). Scenario indications are from the Durand piano score, originally published in 1912; they are absent from the orchestral score.

m.	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	
	a	b	a	a	b			x	x			a	b	a	b	a	a	b	a	b	a	b	b'	b'	b'	b'	b''	b''							

Table 1

the violas, celli, and bassoons to percussion instruments, then to horns and xylophone. At 2, instruments divide the motive in a new way—not after the first four sixteenth notes, *a*, but in the middle of *b*.

Besides passing the motive among the instruments, Debussy achieves timbral variety with three accompanimental figures. Each uses the same basic cell or structural outline of the main motive, a major second, but in two other rhythmic forms, in quarter- or thirty-second- rather than sixteenth-note patterns. The first figure, *x*, consists of the verticalization of the major second C#/D#. With its rising octave leaps in quarters, just before 2, it helps transfer the main motive from the strings to the other instruments. Two other variants add color to the main motive. They exemplify what Debussy said he admired in Wagner's *Parsifal* and wished to create for *Jeux*: an "orchestra without feet" and "an orchestral color which seems to be lit from behind."⁸ The rising thirty-second-note chromatic scale of major seconds, *y* (first violins), and the two descending

semitones that reinforce the eighth-note beats of the motive *ab*, *z* (second violins and violas), do indeed seem to "light" the motive "from behind." These elements and their inverse contours recur again after 3 and throughout the piece. They are never central motives, but sources of color for any situation.

The composer's concentration on reiterating the same motive *ab* for twenty-seven measures draws attention to higher structural levels—to measure groupings and to rhythms made by the statements of the motive. For example, the two measures of *x* before 2 separate the first six measures of *ab* from the following ones. In table 1, notice that the motive at first falls into four-measure groups in mm. 9–12, 13–16, 19–22, then mostly into two-measure groups in mm. 23–24, 25–26, 27–28, later into one-measure groups in m. 29–33, and finally into half-measure groups in m. 34 before disappearing.

This breakdown of the regular two- and four-measure groups beginning at m. 29 signals the disintegration of the section's coherence. At this point, *b* separates itself from the pair *ab* and recurs several times in a new rhythmic form *b'* (a rhythm suggested by the division of the motive by the horns at m. 18). In m. 34, one measure before 4, *b* appears in still another variant, *b''*. Here the pitch and rhythmic contours of the motive also are dissociated. While the rhythm of *b* accelerates at m. 34, its pitch contour stretches out, changing from two descending semitones to one descending and two ascending semitones. This distortion of the rhythmic and melodic shape of *ab* suggests that the end of the section is approaching. The structural accelerando caused by the seven-fold repetition and diminution

⁸Debussy, *Lettres à Caplet*, p. 60. "J'ai terminé la composition de 'Jeux' dont je vous ai parlé. . . . Il faudrait trouver un orchestre 'sans pieds' pour cette musique.—Ne croyez pas que je pense à un orchestre exclusivement composé de culs-de-jatte! Non! Je pense à cette couleur orchestrale qui semble éclairée par derrière et dont il y a de si merveilleux effets dans 'Parsifal'." An orchestra "sans pieds" is an obscure but evocative expression probably referring to the aerial character of his orchestration. "Eclairée par derrière" probably means a melodic line which is enhanced by accompanimental patterns that throw it into relief.

of *b* leads into an area of metric ambiguity at 4. The implied duple time of this passage—2/8, 2/8, 2/8, 3/8, 2/8, 2/8, 2/8—destroys the section's consistent 3/8 meter and regular measure groups. Four measures of timpani rolls obliterate the pulse and hence stop the articulation of time altogether, bringing the section to a close.

Like the section just described, each section of *Jeux* has its own unique quality, a characteristic motive, palette of instrumental color, and rhythmic signature. Repetition of one idea dominates each section, endowing it with its own distinct sense of time and giving rise to an expectation that the same material could continue indefinitely. Contrast and variety are secondary concerns within the sections; in fact, they result from the repetition itself—the same repeated motive given to another set of instruments, divided in a new way, or transposed. Repetition not only helps to define an idea, to make its “essence” clear (so that it will be recognized in later occurrences), but it also allows Debussy to concentrate on the larger aspects of form. It is with rhythmic groups, like those made of the reiterations of *ab* in 1–4, that he succeeds in creating a distinct and self-contained structure in each of the sections of *Jeux*.

II

Inspired by the time of nature and of the universe, which he found multiple and characterized by a different quality from moment to moment, Debussy did not wish his music to capture just one instant, as a painting or a piece of sculpture might. Musicians had the privilege of being able to “capture all the poetry of night and day, of the earth and sky, and recreate their atmosphere and give rhythm to their immense pulsations.”⁹ To reflect a change or a multiplicity of mood, character, or action, Debussy juxtaposed contrasting qualities of sound and time. Sometimes this series of highly individualized sections resembles “a succession of impulses and repose” or “the drawing together and separation of poles of attraction,”¹⁰ constantly achieving a new balance. At other times, mo-

tivated by the scenario, the juxtaposed sections seem unrelated to each other.

The first few minutes of music illustrate the changes from one section to another. Whereas a slow tempo (*très lent*, ♩ = 52), a half-note pulse, and a duple meter characterize the opening prelude, mm. 1–8, a quicker tempo (*scherzando*, ♩ = 72), a predominance of sixteenth notes, and a triple meter characterize the second section 1–4, which we have just examined. In addition, there is a qualitative change in sound from the first section to the next. The opening prelude has three sound levels: descending whole-tone harmonies in the winds, a pedal on B in the violins and violas, and an accompanimental pattern of two rising semitones in the horns, harp, and celesta. In the second section, the chromaticism of the first section's accompaniment moves into the foreground, replacing the whole-tone harmonies as the principal sound. The basses, absent in the first section, enter and fill out the lower register. The melodic line switches from the winds to the strings.

This type of rhythmic and timbral contrast between sections characterizes all of *Jeux*. Similarity or continuity with immediately surrounding sections is secondary to the surprise effect of metamorphosis. Contrast and even discontinuity (change without transition) are of primary importance both in disrupting the equilibrium achieved by one section and in crystallizing a new idea in the next one. Jankélévitch calls such discontinuity in Debussy's music “objective” because it results from contemplating an external reality (here the characters on stage), as opposed to the “subjective” or “rhapsodic” discontinuity in Liszt's music that results from following the oscillations of the composer's psyche between fury and quiet meditation.¹¹ Such discontinuity calls upon the listener not only to perceive the distinctness of the individual sections but also to hear them in relationship to each other.

These relationships—the interplay of both contrasting sound and contrasting rhythmic and metric groups—constitute one of the most interesting and innovative aspects of *Jeux*. We can

⁹Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits* (Paris, 1971), p. 240: “. . . capter toute la poésie de la nuit et du jour, de la terre et du ciel, d'en reconstituer l'atmosphère et d'en rythmer l'immense palpitation.”

¹⁰Stravinsky, *Poetics*, p. 36.

¹¹Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Debussy et le mystère de l'instant* (Paris, 1976), pp. 136–38.

distinguish two general types of interplay, the first of which can perhaps be construed under Debussy's concept of "arabesque."¹² In visual art, this term is associated with the idea of play, and is used to describe the lines in decorative rather than abstract or representative painting. Debussy used the words "*adorable arabesque*" to describe the "free play of sound" he admired in Bach's melodies. With its "curves," Debussy felt, Bach's music evokes "the whole movement of nature."¹³

In *Jeux*, "arabesque" might apply to the play or *jeu* between the various sections of music. Each section develops its own vector, its own force of contrasting shape and direction, which needs resolution or balance. Between many of the sections, there is a free alternation between different rhythms, harmonies, melodies, and instrumental combinations.¹⁴ For example, after an insistently descending line (around 8), there is a rising one (8 + 4mm.); after ambiguous motion, a turning in place (9), comes defined movement (10–12 + 6mm.); after the tension of being pulled in many directions at once (14–16 + 4 mm.) comes resolution by a unidirectional movement (16 + 5mm. to 20); after a static turning (21: mm. 1–4) there follows an expansive melody (21 + 5mm. to 22); periods of whispering alternate with periods of full, lavish orchestral sound (30: mm. 1–3 with mm. 4–

7; 30: mm. 8–9 with 31; etc.) Listening to this music, we do not tend to wonder what melody or harmony will recur but what quality of sound and rhythm will provide counterbalance. Debussy's sense of balance organizes this piece more than does any preexistent formal procedure. To understand this succession of impulses, this constant creation of a new balance, is to understand how Debussy could "capture all the poetry of night and day . . . and give rhythm to their immense pulsations."

In the middle of *Jeux*, however, there is a juxtaposed series of very short, contrasting fragments that do not function strictly to balance one another. The interplay among these fragments is the result not of "free play" from one sonorous and rhythmic pole to another, but of an effort to embody in music the specific interaction among the characters. Interpreting the scenario musically, Debussy composes a different quality of sound and time to correspond with each character. Three metric areas—3/4, 3/8 and 2/4—carefully delineate the three individuals while two types of timbre—clearly defined melodic lines in the strings and trills, tremolos, and glissandi in the winds and harp—differentiate the young man and the girls. The succession of meters and timbres reflects the changing relationships among the characters.

Three different couples formed by the dancers give rise to three large sub-sections of music in this part of the ballet (27–51). Each sub-section begins with a dialogue between two dancers, one of whom is trying to persuade the other to dance. All three sections end with a dance. As the couples become aware that they are leaving out the third person who has become increasingly jealous, the dances are interrupted before they reach any climax. Table 2 shows how meter, timbre, and motive reflect the scenario.

¹²The notion of "arabesque" in both Debussy's writing and his music is a fascinating one. Not only for Debussy, but also for Maurice Denis, Gustav Moreau, and Paul Valéry, the notion of arabesque is linked with ornament, or line for its own sake. Paul Valéry defines his theory of ornament in his *Notebooks* (Paris, 1958) as "the formation by the sensibility of something to fill a vacancy, following local-general laws (contrasts and symmetries)." Françoise Gervais explores the notion of arabesque in Debussy's music, comparing Debussy's use of the word to Islamic art in "La notion d'arabesque chez Debussy," *La Revue Musicale* no. 241 (1958). She finds that the principle of line includes not only the contour of the melody but also the shape of groups of chords.

¹³*Monsieur Croche*, pp. 34, 66. "Dans la musique de Bach, ce n'est pas le caractère de la mélodie qui émeut, c'est sa courbe. . . . Le vieux Bach préférait le jeu libre des sonorités, dont les courbes . . . préparaient l'épanouissement inespéré. . . . C'était l'époque où fleurissait l'adorable arabesque' et la musique participait ainsi à des lois inscrites dans le mouvement total de la nature."

¹⁴André Souris writes similarly about Debussy's music, "Everything happens in Debussy's music as if the sound was, at the same time, the agent and the product of the parts which it connects." See his "Debussy et Stravinsky," *Revue belge de musicologie* 16 (1962), 50.

¹⁵Barraqué, *Debussy*, p. 169. Edward T. Cone describes a similar technique in analyzing Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (a work which, incidentally, was dedicated to Debussy). Cone finds that the cutting off of each section and metric context sets up a tension which "will demand fulfillment after its own suspension" and thus a return to prior material. He also calls this "stratification," or the "separation in musical space" of ideas or areas "juxtaposed in time." See his "Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method," *Perspectives of New Music* 1 (1962), 18–26.

224 **Tempo** $\text{du } \frac{3}{4} = \text{du } \frac{3}{8}$ 226 **Mouv^t** ($\text{♩} = 52$) (sans rigueur) 230 **Rubato** . . . //

ptes Fl. *pp molto legg.* *pp*

Oes Fl. *pp molto legg.* *pp*

Hrb. *pp molto legg.* *pp*

Cl. *pp molto legg.* *pp*

Bons. *pp molto legg.* *pp*

Cors. *pp* *pp*

1^{re} Harpe *pp* *p près de la table* *p simile*

1^{ers} Violons Div. *pp sensibile* *pp*

2^{es} Violons Div. *pp doux et caressant* *pp*

Alts Div. *pp* *pp*

Violles Div. *pp* *pp*

C. B. *pp* *pp*

A **B** **A'**

Example 1
 (Examples 1–4 reproduced by permission of Durand & C^{ie}, Paris)

In the first sub-section, 27–32, Debussy musically translates the conflict between the young man's desire to dance and the girl's reluctance and anxiety in two ways: the metric alternation between 3/4 and 3/8 and the timbral alternation between the strings, with their clearly defined melody, and the winds with their glissandi, trills, and tremolos. Notice in example 1 the profound discontinuity between the outer fragments mm. 224–25 and 230–33, A and A'.

Barraqué offers help explaining such a passage: "The composer sometimes takes into consideration 'absent developments' as if the music unfolds elsewhere, follows its logically deductable course, but recedes for a time into oblivion. In this way, the work escapes conceptual disintegration because the notion of discontinuity takes on a new meaning. This may be called an 'alternative continuity on the structural level.'" ¹⁵ Indeed, these outer fragments

	REH. NO	MEASURE	SCENARIO FROM PIANO SCORE, 1912	METER	TIMBRE	MAIN MOTIVE
I. YOUNG MAN AND GIRL 1						
Dialogue 1: YM/ G1/	27	224	He begins to dance . . .	3/4	string melodic line	A
		226	She follows him, trying to conceal the joy she feels.	3/8	wind tremolos, string syncopation	B
		230			string melodic line	A'
	28	234			wind, harp gliss.	C
Dance 1: YM+G1		237	She runs toward him . . . and they dance together.		string melodic line + harp glissandi, wind trills	D
Dialogue 2: YM/ G1/	29	245		3/4	string melodic line	A
		247		3/8	wind tremolos, string syncopation	B
		251			string melodic line	A'
	30	255	He asks her for a kiss.		horns	C
		256	She escapes.		harp glissandi	
		257	He asks again.		horns	C
Dance 2: YM+G1		258	She escapes, but returns, consenting.		string melodic line + harp glissandi	D
	31	264				
	32	276	<i>passionnément</i>		string melodic line + wind trills	D'
II. YOUNG MAN AND GIRL 2						
Interruption: G2/	33	284	Scorn and jealousy of the second girl, <i>ironique et leger.</i>	2/4	bassoon, flute duet	E
		290	The other two remain in their amorous ecstasy, <i>passionnément.</i>	3/8	string melodic line + flute trills	D'
	34-35	294		2/4	bassoon, flute duet	E
Dialogue 1: G1/ YM/		309	Ironic and mocking dance of the second girl.	2/4	oboe, English horn	F
	38	331	At first the young man watches this dance with curiosity; then becoming particularly interested, he abandons the first girl, unable to resist his desire to dance with the other girl.	3/8	strings	
	39	335	"Let's dance like this."	3/8	clarinet	G

Table 2 (beginning)

	G2/		344	The second girl repeats the same movement mockingly.		bassoon	G'
	YM		352	"Don't mock me."		horn	G
Dance 1: YM+G2		41	357	They dance together.		winds	G
			367	Their dance becomes more tender.		winds	G'
Dialogue 2: G2/		43	377	The girl escapes and goes to hide behind a group of trees.	3/4	glissandi, tremolos	H
	YM/		379			string melodic line	I
	G2/		381			glissandi, tremolos	H
	YM/		383			string melodic line	I
	G2	44	387	After having disappeared for a moment, they return immediately, the young man chasing the girl.	3/8	winds	G'
Dance 2: YM+G2			396	They dance again, just the two of them.		horn + winds	G
			403			winds + strings	J
			420			horn + winds	G
III. GIRL 1 AND GIRL 2 Interruption: G1			429	In the heat of their dance, they did not notice the worried and then upset face of the first girl who, holding her head in her hands, wants to flee.	4/8	violin descent	K
Dialogue 1: G2/		49	435	Her companion tries in vain to restrain her, but she will not listen.	3/4	clarinet, strings ascent	L
	G1/	50	443			violin descent	K
	G2		445			strings ascent	L
	G1		449			violin, oboe, descent	K
Reconciliation: G1+G2			451	The second girl succeeds in taking the first one in her arms.		clarinet + string balanced curve	L'
NEW SECTION: DANCE OF YOUNG MAN AND GIRL 1 AND GIRL 2		51	455	However, the young man intervenes, separating their heads gently.	3/8	English horn	(cd)

Table 2 (continued)

pull together because of their similarity in terms of orchestration and rhythmic character.¹⁶ Accompanying the young man's two attempts to persuade the girl to dance with him, these measures represent his continual plight throughout the girl's hesitation, interjected in mm. 226–29. Here Debussy succeeds in projecting a duality of thought that reflects the visual duality on stage. This duality characterizes the entire section, mm. 245–63 repeating the same procedure as in mm. 224–44.

Already in m. 230 and m. 245, however, the reconciliation between the two metric and timbral poles begins as the young man's string melody *A* moves into the 3/8 context associated with the girl. This momentum reaches a climax at 32. In these measures, marked "*passionnément*," the flute trills (accompanying the girl) and the string melody (associated with the young man) are heard simultaneously for one short moment, *D'*, as the couple embraces.

In the second sub-section, 33–48, the second girl interrupts the embracing couple and convinces the young man to dance with her. Debussy suggests this third dimension of the story with a new meter, 2/4, staccato sounds, and a new key.¹⁷ Yet despite the intrusion of the second girl's ironic dance, Debussy does not allow us to forget the other two who "remain in their amorous ecstasy." The same kind of musical duality that characterizes 27–30 here reflects the visual juxtaposition of the dancing couple with the jealous second girl. The music accompanying the couple's passionate embrace, *D'*, interrupts the dancing girl's ironic lines with a sudden return to 3/8. This time *D'* is not the main figure of the section, but the ground for understanding the rejected girl's retort. With the return of *D'*, the whole of the preceding section becomes to the new section beginning at 33 what a ground is to a figure.

The remainder of this sub-section consists of moments of dancing and moments of intrigue between the young man and the second girl, for whom he has left the first. Although the meter does not change every two or four measures as in 27 or 29, the orchestration, motive, and rhythmic direction reflect their interaction in 38–40 and 43.

The third sub-section begins after 48 with the new couple's realization that again someone has been left out. As with the first couple, the climax of the second couple's dance is aborted with a change of meter and a chromatically descending line. Then a new couple, the two girls, engage in a dialogue. Orchestral and motivic alternation reflect the conflict between the one's chagrin at feeling neglected and the other's determination to console. As

¹⁶Cone calls this procedure "interlock" in Stravinsky's music.

¹⁷The motive of her ironic dance is a distorted variant of the motive of her initial entry at 12. The first melodic curve is concave downward, the latter one is concave upward.

the strings echo the wave-like curve of the clarinet four measures before 51, the girls are reconciled.

This middle part of the ballet, consisting of three *pas de deux* and frequent juxtapositions of meter, timbre, and motive, comes to a close at 51. The return to the *mouvement initial*, the 3/8, and even the motive that accompanied the rising curtain at 6 all signal a major structural moment in the piece. From this point, there is no change from the 3/8 meter until 78, nearly at the end of the piece. A synthesis of the metric, rhythmic, and timbral ideas in the piece begins as the three characters join in one dance. The movement arrested by the 4/8 in 48 gathers momentum again.

It is in this middle part of the ballet, outlined in table 2—almost one-third of the work—that the listener confronts the compositional problem of *Jeux*. Since they are inspired by the multiplicity of characters and activity on stage, the contrasts in meter, orchestration, motive, and feeling draw attention to continual metamorphosis rather than to any underlying continuity. This emphasis on change from one fragment to the next rather than on change within the individual fragments is necessary to make the listener concentrate on the work's formal mobility and on relationships between its sections.¹⁸ Although there is carefully maintained balance in the flux and occasional instances of "alternative continuity" (connection between fragments that do not immediately succeed one another), form is not something that can be imagined or described in spatial terms. Before the problem of form in *Jeux* can be addressed, one must realize that, in addition to the constant invention of new qualities of sound and time in the ballet, there is also a perpetual renewal of ideas and subtle links that underlie its discontinuities.

¹⁸Several contemporary composers indicate *Jeux* as the source of their "moment forms." Moment forms, as Stockhausen defines them in "Momentform," *Texte zur elektronischen und instrumentalen Musik* (Cologne, 1963), render every moment, "something individual, independent, and centered in itself, capable of existing on its own," rather than the consequence or cause of any surrounding moments. However, in his "Moment Form in Twentieth Century Music," *Musical Quarterly* 64 (1978), 189, Jonathan D. Kramer points out that "*Jeux* . . . is highly sectionalized, to be sure, but the sections are as often in motion towards other sections as they are static." As he says, "to move into the realm of moment forms was another huge step, one that Debussy never took."

III

Debussy's criticism and letters suggest that he did not consider formal mobility and underlying continuity to be mutually exclusive. Analyzing Mussorgsky's song cycle, *The Nursery*, in 1901, Debussy praised the composer not only for using a form which he found "quite multiple" and never ordinary, but also for connecting this "succession of little strokes" by "a mysterious link."¹⁹ Later he wrote to his friend Louis Laloy, "I would like to make something inorganic in appearance and yet well-ordered at its core."²⁰ Writing to Pierné on 5 March 1914, just after the latter had conducted *Jeux* for the first time in concert, Debussy expressed some dissatisfaction with the performance in terms implying that some "link" underlies the series of juxtaposed timbres and meters: "It seems to me that the different episodes lacked homogeneity. The link that connects them may be subtle, but it exists, doesn't it? You know it as well as I."²¹ While Debussy's references to "link" and "homogeneity" remain somewhat mysterious, an attempt to penetrate his meaning may help us to understand how the music coheres.

There are several types of continuity that bind the various episodes of *Jeux*—timbral, motivic, and, most important of all, temporal. First, whether subtle from one section to the next or overt in such cases as example 1, recurrence of timbres underlies the work's constant metamorphosis. At 5, for example, ele-

ments are synthesized from both the opening prelude and 1–4: from the prelude, whole-tone harmonies on downbeats in the winds, the pedal of B in the upper strings, as well as the soft harp harmonics, and from 1–4, violas and celli in the lower register, the chromaticism (which now connects the whole-tone harmonies), and the timpani rolls. In other parts of the ballet, the recurrence of an event or feeling will signal the return of the timbre associated with it. Almost the same descending wind and string line and the same rising grace note pick-up from 8, when the first tennis ball falls on the stage, recur with the intrusion of another ball at 80.

Motives as well as timbres recur. Motives often accompany events in the scenario that return or develop: thus the motive in the oboe with the indication "*marqué*" just before 24 not only accompanies the young man's appearance on stage, but also comes to be identified with his invitation to dance at 25 and 26. A musical idea may also return, albeit transformed, to suggest a recurrent feeling: thus the melodic contour first heard with the appearance of the first girl at 10 recurs with the appearance of the second girl at 12, implying that both must have felt "fearful and curious," though the scenario indicates this only for the first girl. A similar semitone pattern (with inverse contour) underlies the "ironic and mocking dance" of one of the girls later in the ballet, at 35.

Debussy also apparently wished us to remember his motives because of the many *jeux* he plays with them throughout the entire piece. Eimert has shown how all the motives of this ballet have the same basic shape, a part of a wave motion.²² Yet the same quantity (a set of durations and pitches) may have different qualities and functions in new contexts. Debussy treats the motives as melodic formulae—somewhat as in folk poetry or some forms of chant; they are ideas whose "mean image" returns throughout the piece but within many variants, sometimes even metamorphosing into new motives. Barraqué has used the ex-

¹⁹*Monsieur Croche*, p. 29. Speaking of Mussorgsky's music, Debussy writes about his "art sans procédés, sans formules desséchantes." He continues, "cette forme est tellement multiple qu'il est impossible de l'apparenter aux formes établies—on pourrait dire administratives, cela se tient et se compose par petites touches successives, reliées par un lien mystérieux et par un don de lumineuse clairvoyance."

²⁰Barraqué, *Debussy*, p. 159. "Ce que je voudrais faire, c'est quelque chose d'inorganique en apparence et pourtant d'ordonné dans le fonds." André Schaeffner finds Debussy's attempt to "render interdependent what appears to have no apparent connection" in earlier works such as *Nocturnes* and *Pelléas et Mélisande*. See his "Debussy et la musique russe," *Musique Russe*, vol. I (Paris, 1953), p. 135.

²¹The text of this letter to G. Pierné (from a private collection) is printed in the catalogue of the exhibition, *Claude Debussy* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1962), p. 67. "Il m'a semblé que les divers épisodes manquaient d'homogénéité. Le lien qui les relie est subtil, mais il existe pourtant? Tu le sais aussi bien que moi."

²²Eimert, "Jeux," pp. 10, 15.

The image shows three staves of musical notation. The first staff contains measures 9, 49, 53, and 57. The second staff contains measures 118, 122, and 126. The third staff contains measures 459, 463, and 52. Various instruments are indicated: va. (viola), vc. (violin), cl. (clarinet), e.h. (English horn), ob. (oboe), vns. (violin), and fl. (flute). Motives are labeled with letters: 'a' and 'b' under measures 9-10; 'c' and 'd' under measures 49-50; 'b' and 'd' under measures 53-54; 'b' and 'd' under measures 57-58; 'c' and 'd' under measures 118-119; 'b' and 'd' under measures 122-123; 'b' and 'd' under measures 126-127; 'c' and 'd' under measures 459-460; 'b' and 'd' under measures 463-464; and 'b' and 'd' under measures 52-53. Dynamics include *p*, *pp*, and *f*. Performance markings include accents, slurs, and triplets.

Example 2

pression “*mutation poétique*” to describe Debussy’s constant transformation of these tiny motives, the “*thèmes-objets*” which do not develop but recur, divide, and recombine in ever-new ways.²³

Example 2 shows this process. From the permutation of *ab* and *cd* emerges a new motive *bd*. At first *b* and *d* remain distinct, written for two different instruments in mm. 53–54. However, the pair *bd* appears as a single phrase played by one instrument in mm. 57–58, 59–60, and 61–62. Elements *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d* recur throughout *Jeux* in a variety of arrangements and metric positions. In mm. 118–21, they form a larger group *cdbd*; in mm. 122–23 and m. 126–27, *b* and *d* recombine to make a new pair, *db*. This process of permuting preexisting ideas characterizes all of *Jeux*.

Only one motive keeps its identity, *cd*. The open and rising contour of this motive reflects its continual renewal. Heard first with the rising curtain at 6, *cd* recurs throughout the piece; however, its role vacillates continuously between figure and ground. For example, at 14, it is doubled; at 22, it is not the main motive of the section, but a vertical counter-motive. After its absence from the middle part of the ballet, it returns again as the main motive in 51, but in the final dance it is the countersubject to a much longer melody, which begins in 64. It later becomes part of the general frenzied sound, almost losing its identity in 75, until it eventually drops out.

²³Barraqué, *Debussy*, p. 181. A similar process of constantly introducing new motives while transforming the shape and function of old motives can be found in *Gigues* from the orchestral *Images*.

The motive *cd* typifies other motives in *Jeux*. Like them, it begins two measures in length; Marcel Dietschy quotes Pierre Louÿs as saying that Debussy “loved to cite certain lines from *Parsifal*, those that had the same character: a very soft theme, not prepared, that lasts two measures and then disappears.”²⁴ When it combines with *bd* in 14 to form a four-measure group *cdbd*, and with variants of *b* in 51 to form a six-measure group *cdbbbb* (see example 2), *cd* signals the expansion of the motives into larger and larger measure groups. This expansion culminates in the eight-measure melody of 61–63 and the thirteen-measure melody of 64–67, the only true melodies in the piece. Significantly, they occur at the most sentimental moments of the ballet. In many ways, then, *cd* symbolizes the entire composition.²⁵

The third and most significant type of continuity in *Jeux* is temporal. Debussy continually refers to movement in his writing, believ-

²⁴Marcel Dietschy, *La Passion de Debussy* (Neuchâtel, 1962), pp. 64–65. Louÿs lists as examples of these two-measure themes the Lake theme and the last page of the Good Friday scene.

²⁵The recurrence of *cd* has led some critics to regard *Jeux* as a free rondo. The appearance of this motive does mark important structural moments of the ballet (i.e., the rising curtain at 6 and the beginning of the reconciliation among the characters with the return to 3/8 at 51). However, this author concurs with Eimert in rejecting this formal description; Eimert points to the unequal amount of time between statements of *cd* (his *A*). Unlike a rondo, *Jeux* makes one anticipate constant renewal rather than the recurrence of old ideas. Moreover, the brevity and fragmentation of the motive establish a tension within each section that does not disappear even though a new motive and section interrupt the process.

ing that “music and poetry are the only two arts that *move in space*” (emphasis added).²⁶ Even when criticizing Wagner, he repeatedly praised the movement of his music.²⁷ The clue to understanding the “mysterious link” within *Jeux* lies in its movement.

When Debussy said that the episodes of *Jeux* were “homogeneous,” he was not denying the constantly changing meter and tempo indication, the music’s apparent discontinuity inspired by the visual juxtaposition of the characters on stage. Instead, he was signaling the necessity for a common pulse or beat throughout the piece, an innate sense of temporal continuity that would bind the various sections.

Examining the metric changes in the ballet, we notice that there are only two tempi specified, MM. 52 and 78. These tempi are almost exactly related in the proportion of 2 to 3. From the beginning through 26, the pulse is essentially constant—the sixteenth note in 4/4, ♩ = 52 is equivalent to the eighth note in 3/8, ♩ = 78—and this is equally true from 51 to the end of the piece.

At 27, however, the situation changes (see ex. 1). With the eighth-note keeping its value despite the change of meter, the pulse changes from a dotted quarter to a quarter. This change in tempo has been prepared, for toward the end of 26 the 3/8 measures are divided into two eighth-note groupings, and the fifth and sixth measures after 26 (though not the seventh) actually form a long 3/4 group. Thus by the time the metric change to 3/4 is indicated at 27, the listener is already feeling the pulse in quarter notes. The new tempo indicated in the third measure after 27 is also mitigated, for while now the quarter note does indeed change its value, the pulse remains constant—the change

of tempo to ♩ = 52 and the return of the 3/8 mean that the whole measure now moves at the rate of the previous half note.

From 27 through 50 all metric changes occur in relation to this one. Even in the change to 2/4 at 33, Debussy writes “♩ = ♩ *du 3/8 à peu près.*” At the alternation back and forth between 3/4 and 3/8 before and at 35, Debussy writes either ♩ = ♩ or ♩ = ♩ of the preceding section. At the change to 4/8 in 48, Debussy writes again “♩ = ♩ *du mouvement précédent.*” If the true metric proportions of this section are to be perceived, the eighth note must have a constant value.

Certainly there are constant relaxations and intensifications in the tempo. At 38, Debussy writes “*moins vif que le 3/8 initial.*” But after most rhythmic nuances such as “*en retenant*” or “*cédez*” come “*a tempo*” or “*au mouvement,*” and after many sections marked “*retenu*” come the indications “*serrez un peu*” (within 55, Debussy writes the sequence, “*tempo rubato . . . serrez*” three times within a period of only eleven measures.) Even the retard of 38 is later made up with “*en animant progressivement*” within 46–48. All relaxations of the tempo are eventually compensated for.

The tip-off that Debussy intended a constant pulse in *Jeux* is provided by the tempo direction at 51. Here Debussy writes “*mouvement initial*” as he changes from 3/4 to 3/8. Since there is *no* direction (as so often in earlier cases) that the quarter note is to remain constant, this can only mean that now the measure will be moving at the rate of the previous quarter note, the pulse remaining constant. From this point to the end, the only change (to 3/4 at 78) indicates that for a short time the measures go twice as slowly as in the 3/8. In the closing measures, the pulse is constant—♩ of 3/8 = ♩ of 4/4 as in the opening measures. Thus, sections that contrast and pull apart in every other way are held together by the constant pulse or eighth note.

This temporal agent is the piece’s “mysterious link.” Through it, Debussy expects the listener to connect the various sections, to perceive the continuity beneath the music’s apparent discontinuity. Together with recurring timbres and motives, this constant temporal unit insures the work’s coherence.

²⁶*Monsieur Croche*, p. 46. “La musique et la poésie sont les deux seuls arts qui se meuvent dans l’espace.” These words from June 1901 come from the composer before he became enchanted with the dance, the third art which “moves in space.”

²⁷On this point, he agrees with his friend Pierre Louÿs, when Louÿs writes on 29 October 1896, “Wagner is the man who, since the beginning of art, has best understood and best explained what *movement* is in its various degrees, from its absence to its paroxysm.” Speaking of *Parsifal*, he continues, “The eulogy of movement seems to be praise of a detail, but not at all. Movement is life.” See François Lesure, ed., “Debussy: Textes et documents inédits,” *Revue de musicologie* 48 (1962), p. 65.

IV

The question of form remains to be answered. Debussy gives a clue in a startling letter to his publisher, Durand, in 1907. "Music is not, in its essence, a thing which can flow within a rigorous and traditional form. It is *de couleurs et de temps rythmés*."²⁸ In this statement, Debussy points to an important aspect of the revolution that took place in music at the turn of the twentieth century: the shift in the hierarchy of elements responsible for structure in a composition. Form is created by (orchestral) color and rhythm more than by traditional thematic development and functional harmony. In describing his *Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, he even said, "I wrote decorative music, if you will, the illustration, in timbres and rhythms, of a noble text."²⁹

However, in Debussy's letter to Durand the real clue to a new concept of form lies in an understanding of its last word. We can read the adjective "*rythmés*" as modifying not only "*temps*," but also "*couleurs*." In this case, the statement means "form is the rhythmization of sections, each with their own color and sense of time" (rather than "form is composed of colors and rhythmic moments of time"). Such a definition suggests a new attitude toward form based on a rhythm of sections whose organization is the organization of form.

By dividing *Jeux* according to its metric changes, one will come close to its compositional core. Table 3 shows that *Jeux* consists of five sections. Again, as in table 2, the scenario motivates this temporal division of the music. The 4/4 meter of the prelude and postlude, sections X and X', frames the action like the stage and scenery within which the action occurs. The ambiguity of the whole-tone harmonies reinforces this interpretation. Sections Y and Y' in 3/8 introduce the characters and embody their reconciliation after the alternation in the middle section, Z, between dances in 3/8 and

rhythmically dissonant passages in 3/4 and 2/4 that stop or challenge the 3/8.

Section Y' (51–77) is a remarkable synthesis of the opposing meters and rhythmic patterns which had struggled during the middle section, Z. In Y', the 2/4 and later the 3/4 divisions of the measure appear *within* the notated 3/8 just as the dancers unite in their *pas de trois*. At first the contrasting metric divisions appear subtly as accompaniment; then they challenge the 3/8 in juxtaposition to it; and finally, they create the tremendous rhythmic tension that drives to a climax with the simultaneous division of the measures into both 3/8 and 3/4 or 2/4 groups.

A play between 2/4 and 3/8 characterizes the first part of Y'. In this section, duple patterns interact with triple ones in numerous ways. As the characters contemplate "letting themselves follow their fantasy"—that is, all three dancing together—the group  comes in recurring juxtaposition to the triple meter motive  (see ex. 3). Recalling section Z, such metric duality is reinforced by timbral contrasts, the strings playing the duple patterns and the winds, the triple motive. Alternating duple and triple rhythms are also part of the section's main motive in 55–56. But at the start of the *pas de trois* (61) and in 68, the duple and triple divisions of the measure are simultaneous, reflecting the union of the dancers. Such juxtaposition and superimposition of duple and triple patterns build great tension, especially with the return of the motive *cd* in 69 and 70, when the time interval of each pattern is only one or two measures.

Four measures before 71, the duple rhythms expand across the barline and turn into a hemiola, one large 3/4 group within two measures of 3/8 (recalling the 3/4 groups in 17 and 18). As the music becomes more intense—some sections even marked "*violent*"—hemiola patterns add a third type of rhythmic complexity. In 70–75, for example, the hemiola confounds rhythmic clarity by appearing both simultaneously with the duple and triple patterns and in successive juxtaposition with them. Because of its rhythmically dissonant character, Debussy uses the hemiola to drive the music to a climax.

In Y', then, duple (2/4), triple (3/8), and hemiola (3/4) patterns struggle for prominence within one metric context. In this part of the ballet, there are almost no scenario instructions other than those describing the characters' desire to dance in 51, marking the beginning of their *pas de trois* at 61, and indicating the dance's continued intensification in 68. This absence of precise descriptions allowed Debussy to make the music the central drama. The ever-changing relationships between the three meters—from simultaneity to successive juxtaposition, from figure to accompanimental ground—create a more powerful scenario and translate what is happening within the three characters on stage more appropriately than if Debussy had attempted

²⁸Debussy, *Lettres à son éditeur* (Paris, 1927), p. 55. "La musique n'est pas par son essence une chose qui puisse se couler dans une forme rigoureuse et traditionnelle. Elle est de couleurs et de temps rythmés."

²⁹*Monsieur Croche*, p. 305. "J'ai fait de la musique décorative, si vous voulez, l'illustration en timbres et rythmes d'un noble texte."

REHEARSAL NUMBERS	beginning-5	6-26	27-50	51-77	78-79	80-end
SECTION	X	Y	Z	Y'		X'
NOTATED METER	4/4 3/8 4/4	3/8	3/4 3/8 2/4 3/8	3/8 3/4 + 3/8 + 2/4	3/4	3/8 4/4 3/8
BASS LINE	B A B					A B A
SCENARIO	To "Tempo set the stage" initial" set the stage	"Tempo initial": introduction of tennis ball and main characters	Juxtaposition of man and first girl, their dance	Juxtaposition of man and second girl, their dance	"Mvt. initial": reconciliation of three meters and three dancers, their dance	Their triple kiss Symmetrical reversal of opening measures, open-ended

Table 3

Example 3

Example 4

to create a musical replica of the dancers' exact movements.

At 78, the work reaches a dramatic and musical climax (see ex. 4). Here "in a passionate gesture, the young man unites their three heads and a triple kiss allows them to merge in an ecstasy that lasts until the 3/8." To bring the dance to a culmination so that the characters may kiss, Debussy switches to 3/4, the meter that interrupts the 3/8 dances throughout *Jeux*. The orchestra, at its loudest and fullest in the ballet, joins for two measures in one melodic gesture. With this gesture, Debussy achieves a merger of the work's contrasting meters: the rhythmic motive associated with the 3/8, $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ and the contour of the 3/8 motive *cd* come at this point in 3/4, $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$. Then the flutes and oboes, "doux et expressif," echo

the moment three times as if to prolong the kiss in the three dancers. The characters lose themselves in this sound until the intrusion of another tennis ball and the return to the *mouvement initial* and 3/8.

From 80 to the end, Debussy completes the frame begun at the outset of the piece. Here, as in the beginning, the dancers are absent and the audience is left to the atmosphere of night. The three parts of the frame balance one another at the end, 3/8, 4/4, 3/8, as they do in the beginning, 4/4, 3/8, 4/4. This inner call for balance explains the return to the *mouvement initial* and the 3/8 in the last four measures of the piece. By ending with the 3/8—the meter of the tennis game and the dance—Debussy seems to suggest that the games may begin again at any time.

With these rhythmic relationships among the sections of *Jeux*, Debussy was able to make the temporal dimension primary in the creation of form. In this way, *Jeux* challenges the notion of form as "object"—something that can be "seen" in an instant as if it were in space. Not conceivable in the spatial terms of geometry or architecture, this form is one of constant flux—it is a process, not a product. With it, Debussy returns to the ancient notion of rhythm as synonymous with form, that is, as meaning "distinctive form, proportioned figure, arrangement, disposition."³⁰

V

"Process" form fascinated many thinkers as well as artists at the turn of the century. Henri Bergson, for example, developed an entire philosophy centered on the notion of process in the unconscious. Debussy's idea of time and form as constant metamorphosis resembles in striking ways Bergson's concept of *durée*—time as the unconscious perceives it. In a 1910 interview, Bergson called Debussy's music "a music of *durée*," and confessed that he had an "intuitive predilection" for it,³¹ while Debussy's friend Louis Laloy claimed that there are "secret correspondences" linking Debussy and Bergson. "Such a music could not be produced except in the same environment as such a philosophy, and vice versa."³²

For both the composer and the philosopher, time is a free-flowing medium that depends for its perception on what is filling it. In *Time and Free Will* (1889), Bergson said that time could not be evenly divided as by a clock, whose

measurement dissolves time into tiny points in space. *Durée* is "the development of a thought that gradually changes as it takes shape. . . . Time is invention or it is nothing at all."³³ Debussy also considered time a void to be filled differently according to the context or feeling; he consciously sought to translate into music the "lyric movements of the soul" and the "capriciousness of dreams." As this article has tried to show, each section of *Jeux* creates a different sense of time, depending on the character, feeling, or action.

The idea of time as a function of invention rather than as quantitative length led both Debussy and Bergson to focus on qualitative instead of quantitative change. In the same year (1907) that Debussy wrote to Durand defining musical form in terms of two qualities, timbre and rhythm, Bergson published *Creative Evolution*, exploring the nature of qualitative change.

From our first glance at the world, before we even make out *bodies* in it, we distinguish *qualities*. . . . In the smallest discernible fraction of a second, in the almost instantaneous perception of a sensible quality, there may be trillions of oscillations which repeat themselves. The permanence of a sensible quality consists in this repetition of movements, as the persistence of life consists in a series of palpitations. The primal function of perception is precisely to grasp a series of elementary changes under the form of a quality or of a simple state, by a work of condensation. . . . In short, the qualities of matter are so many stable views that we take of its instability.³⁴

These same words could be used to describe how repetition of a motive establishes a distinct quality of sound and time in each section of *Jeux*. All the slight modifications of the motive *ab* in 1–4, for example, never alter its essence.

³⁰Emile Benveniste, "The notion of 'rhythm' in its Linguistic Expression," *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. by M. E. Meck (Coral Gables, 1971), pp. 281–88. Benveniste argues that rhythm was synonymous with form in ancient Greek times, and that it was specifically used to mean process form, "the form in the instant that it is assumed by what is moving, mobile, and fluid, the form of that which does not have organic consistency, the form as improvised, momentary, changeable," to distinguish it from object form, "form realized and viewed in some way as an object."

³¹Henri Bergson, *Mélanges* (Paris, 1972), p. 844.

³²Louis Laloy, "La Musique chez soi: M. Henri Bergson et la Musique," *Comœdia* (Février-Mars 1914). This article was graciously sent to the author by the grandson of Louis, Vincent Laloy.

³³Henri Bergson, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1970), pp. 783, 784.

³⁴Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (London, 1919), pp. 317–18. Bergson explains memory in a similar way: "The brain functions to choose past events, to simplify the past, to use it, but not to conserve it." Although we may have seen or heard something once, ten times, or one hundred times, our memory does not retain each instance but only the "mean image."

A particular aspect of qualitative change, the continuity of the past in the present, also intrigued both Debussy and Bergson. Bergson included this notion in his definition of *durée*, "the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego . . . refrains from separating its present state from its former states."³⁵ It is "a succession of qualitative changes which melt into and permeate one another."³⁶ In Debussy's music, the past can also be said to "melt into and permeate" each present moment, in that motives return in ever-new variants in *Jeux*, as do timbres, meters, and rhythmic patterns. These recurrences give the work its coherence.

Yet in spite of these parallelisms, Debussy and Bergson understood movement differently. Bergson found "a radical difference between, on the one hand, an evolution whose continuous phases interpenetrate each other with a type of internal growth and, on the other, a succession whose distinct parts are juxtaposed."³⁷ As the opposite of *durée*, he used the word "cinematography" throughout *Creative Evolution* to describe processes that involve constant change by way of a series of distinct forms. Perception, thought, and language fall into this category. For Bergson, the cinematic way of thinking was artificial; what was real was an acknowledgement of the continual flux of the unconscious.

In Debussy's music, however, cinematic process plays an important role. Juxtaposed qualities of sound and time form multiple relationships impossible in an exclusively linear music. In 1913 Debussy himself used the word "cinematography" to describe the time of the creative process, the "cinematography of instants through which the author moved while he was composing his piece."³⁸ By means of

juxtaposition and discontinuity, Debussy was able to extend the idea of continual metamorphosis into the realm of form.

Therefore, although *durée* and cinematography are mutually exclusive from Bergson's point of view, they are complementary in Debussy's music. Debussy understood the creative process to involve both the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, as in the shots of a film, as well as the constant engendering of new ideas out of previous ones, as in Bergson's *durée*. He expected his listener not only to perceive the distinctness of his ideas but also to connect the music's various parts, thereby bridging the apparent discontinuity of its disparate moments—just as the viewer of a film understands the montage as a continuum.

Jeux lies at the crossroads of a change in aesthetic values from the need for continuity to the desire to create discontinuity. While most nineteenth-century music is characterized by continuity and "organic growth," *Jeux* embraces both continuity and discontinuity. The apparently discontinuous sections articulated by many timbres and rhythmic patterns are not without subtle links with one another; the discontinuity is thus a *connected* one, involving intricate relationships among the various parts. And the underlying continuity of *Jeux* is not one of smooth transitions from one part to the next but is one of *movement* or *change*—which, however, does not obscure the distinction of its parts. What links the discontinuous ideas in *Jeux* even more than the motivic, intervallic, and instrumental connections from section to section is the continuity of time. Debussy's rhythmic organization of time gives rise to a musical form characterized by both constant meta-
morphosis and continual renewal.



³⁵Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris, 1889), trans. by F. L. Pogson as *Time and Free Will* (New York, 1910), p. 100.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁷Bergson, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 1261.

³⁸*Monsieur Croche*, p. 242. "La cinématographie des instants par lesquels l'auteur a passé au moment de la com-

position de son œuvre." In a private conversation with the author, Jankélévitch has pointed out that the word "cinematography" became quite popular after Bergson's extensive use of it in *Creative Evolution*. Debussy might have picked it up for this reason without necessarily being interested in early film techniques.